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Linguistics/psychology
Like is not Like that:
A Linguistic and social
analysis

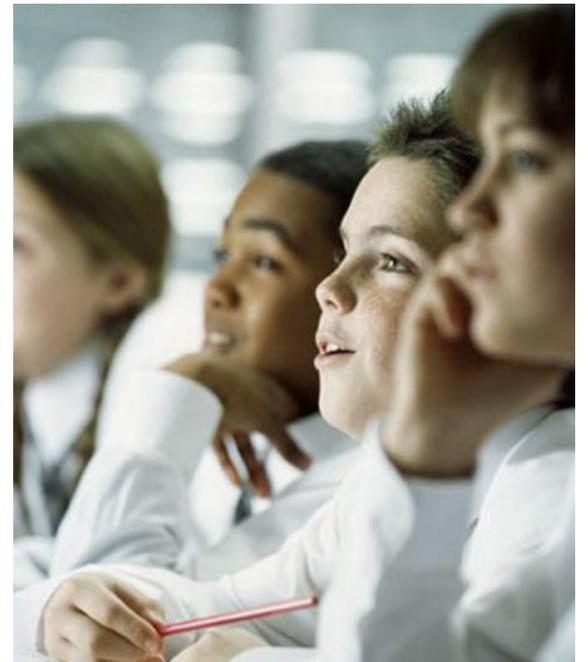
Like is Not Like That: A Linguistic and Social Analysis

My proposed thesis topic would combine the study of linguistics with social and psychological aspects of the English language. Focusing on the new pervasiveness of the word 'like' as a grammatical structure may provide some insight into the mindset of the speaker and the context of the speech interaction. Language changes for social reasons, and I intend to discuss possibilities why the phrase "He was like, 'I'm...'" is so popular among young speakers.

With regards to slang, it is important to remember that new grammatical structures follow certain guidelines. When 'like' is combined with a form of [to be], usually in the past tense, it replaces the need to say 'said.' For example, when talking with friends, young people will often replay an earlier conversation using

phrases such as, "and he was like, 'I never want to see her again,' and I was like, 'You're a spaz* ...'" This 'like' is no accidental addition to our speech. It carries meaning, both linguistically and socially. What changes have caused us to replace such a fundamental word? If a speaker uses 'like' to replace 'said,' hearers understand the meaning, even though they do not analyze the structure. My goal is to explore and explain this replacement

Languages have fascinated me since I was a child. I started studying music (a language unto itself) at age six, and introductory Spanish and French at the age of ten. Language is a puzzle; a puzzle with arbitrary pieces and infinite possible combinations. Learning linguistics is like learning the rules of how a piece can be shaped,



what it can be combined with, and how to look more carefully at the final product. English speakers all over the world are using this new 'like' formation, with little or no insight into why they do it. But the change in language reflects changes in society, and I plan on closely investigating this particular change, said to was like, and what it could reflect about our society.

*From spastic, slang.